Inspire

Inspiring Schools to Flourish Through Accreditation

School Coordinator Handbook

Accountability Through Standards | Excellence Through Improvement

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ACSI *Inspire* School Coordinator Handbook

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Letter of Introduction

Accreditation is primarily focused on school improvement. Throughout the process, the school demonstrates the effectiveness with which it meets established educational standards of quality, establishes goals for improvement, and creates a plan to fulfill those goals. In Christian schools, these standards genuinely align with the school's mission and philosophy. Accreditation and school improvement help schools continuously challenge themselves and manage growth in an orderly, systematic way. This brings a vigorous dynamic into the school by engaging every constituent in a process of organizational review and goal setting. Being involved in an ongoing cycle of accreditation fosters a growth mindset and helps a school examine how it is remaining true to its own foundational statements. This provides accountability and validation to its community. As the leader of that process, you will leave a lasting mark on your school and provide a strong foundation for students well into the future.
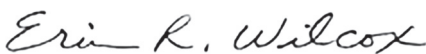
This handbook has been provided to assist you in the process as you:

- plan and prepare for completing the self-study,

- make assignments for faculty, staff, and the governing body,

- make arrangements for a team visit, and

- manage the process and paperwork to keep everything on track.

The information that follows, and various support documents found on ACSI's website, have been developed by many experienced educators as a result of their experiences over the years. These self-study coordinators have served in both large and small schools in the United States and around the world. They have found, as you will, that not everything applies exactly the same way in every situation. As you become more familiar with the *Inspire* protocol, you will gain an appreciation of the required elements, and you will also figure out that some things, like schedules, are a little more flexible and may have to be adjusted based on your situation. Please feel free to reach out to your divisional accreditation director for advice or help when an unusual situation arises.

We have provided a **Timeline for School Coordinators** to help you through the process.

Congratulations and best wishes to you as you begin your accreditation journey with ACSI! May the Lord bless you and your entire school family as you work together toward this goal.

Erin Wilcox, EdD
Assistant Vice President, ACSI

Stephen Deck, EdS
Executive Director, ACSI Commission on Accreditation

Accreditation Process Overview

The accreditation process begins with a careful review of ACSI's standards and processes. For an overview, download the *ACSI Inspire Standards Manual* from ACSI's website. Meeting the standards requires a strong commitment by the governing body, school leadership, faculty, staff, and school community.

The following steps outline the accreditation process:

1. **Application (available from the divisional accreditation office)**

   The completed application should be submitted with the application fee and a copy of the governing body minutes indicating approval for the school to pursue accreditation with ACSI.

   Some schools may wish to undergo a joint accreditation with ACSI and another accrediting agency. ACSI does have cooperative accreditation agreements with various U.S. regional agencies. If a school desires to proceed with joint accreditation, there will be a place on the application to indicate that, or the school should make a written statement to that effect, including the name of the joint accrediting agency, to the ACSI divisional office. Application must be made separately to each accreditation agency involved. If you want more information on the advantages of joint accreditation, contact your divisional accreditation office.

   It should be noted that a joint accreditation may involve some adjustments to the processes described in this document. Your divisional accreditation director will work through those with you.

2. **Candidate Status Visit**

   Once the accreditation application has been received, the school will be contacted to establish a date for a candidacy visit. The purpose of this visit is to determine whether the school can meet the accreditation standards, complete the self-study, and host a visiting team within a three-year period. It

is also a time for the school leadership and staff to have their questions answered about the accreditation process and timeline. The purpose of the visit is twofold:

- For ACSI to gain sufficient knowledge of the school and assess its readiness to begin the accreditation process. To accomplish this objective, a divisional office representative will make a one- or two-day visit to determine the extent to which:

  o The school has a clearly formulated Christian approach to education, which is evident in its foundational documents

  o There is evidence the school will be able to meet the accreditation Standards (see *Inspire Standards/Indicators Checklist*)

  o The school staff is Christian and sufficient in number and qualification for the school's operation

  o The instructional program demonstrates cultural sensitivity and effectively implements the school's philosophy and objectives

  o The school has sound organizational procedures

  o The school ensures that the services it provides meet acceptable standards of health and safety

  o The school fulfills all applicable legal requirements

  o Instructional resources are adequate and appropriate to fulfill the school's mission

  o The school grounds and buildings are adequate for the support of the total school program

  o The financial resources and management of the school can sustain a sound educational program consistent with its philosophy and objectives

Please note: A school is typically able to apply for accreditation after it has been in operation a year, or more, with the team visit taking place up

to three years after the school has been accepted into candidacy. A number of the indicators ask for evidence that the school is meeting students' needs, helping them make adequate yearly progress academically, and showing financial sustainability over time. Until the school has been in existence for a couple of years, it cannot adequately demonstrate those or other measures of health and success. If the divisional accreditation director determines that the school needs more time to mature before applying for accreditation, he/she may suggest the *Steps to School Improvement* program, which helps the school get ready for accreditation at a more gradual pace and provides additional support.

- To prepare the school for the self-study process and the subsequent evaluation by the visiting team. To accomplish this objective, the divisional office representative will:

  o Review the entire self-study process with the school leadership and other appropriate constituents (faculty, school governing body) to ensure everyone understands expectations

  o Establish a proposed timeline to accomplish all the steps in the process

  o Inform the school of any areas of operation that do not meet accreditation standards and suggest improvements that should be made during the candidacy period

It will be helpful for the representative if the school can provide him/her in advance of arrival with as much documentation as possible to assist his/her understanding of the school.

The representative will complete a copy of the *Standards/Indicators Checklist* at the time of the visit. Please note that this is an initial overview, and it is expected that the school may not be meeting all the standards completely at the time of the candidacy visit—this is a starting point. Once candidate status has been granted, the school will receive official notification from the ACSI divisional office. A chairperson will be assigned to work with the school within the last 12-18 months prior to the actual team visit.

3. **Chairperson**

The chairperson assigned to the school has been trained in the many components of the ACSI accreditation protocol. The chairperson serves as a resource person throughout the self-study process. All expenses incurred by the chairperson in serving the school, including an on-campus pre-visit and/or the visit readiness check, are paid by the school. However, expenses for one candidacy visit are included in the application fee (U.S. schools only).

4. **Team Visit**

Upon completion of the self-study, a team of Christian school educators is scheduled to visit the school. The number of team members depends on the size of the school, the number of grades, and the number of campuses involved. The chairperson of the team or the divisional office will notify the school with the names of the team members and their schools, to give the school a chance to agree to the proposed team members. The length of the visit is approximately three to four days. The school is responsible for all the expenses of travel and of hosting the visiting team members.

5. **Divisional Accreditation Commission**

At the conclusion of the visit, the team's report will be forwarded to the ACSI divisional office. The report will be reviewed at the next meeting of the ACSI divisional accreditation commission. The school is then notified of the commission's decision.

6. **Annual Reports**

After becoming accredited, the school will be responsible to submit an annual report to the divisional office. The school will also be responsible for submitting the name(s) of a school leader and a faculty member who they deem would be effective accreditation team members. This is an important part of the accreditation process and is a way for your faculty and school leadership to participate in professional development through the accreditation process.

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Timeline for the School Coordinator

1. Initial Application

- Download a copy of the *ACSI Inspire Standards Manual* from ACSI's website.

- Review the standards and indicators for ACSI Accreditation.

- Submit application for accreditation (available from the divisional accreditation office). Include the *Standards/Indicators Checklist* (the school may not be effectively meeting all of the indicators initially; however, the candidacy period will give the school time to work toward that). The application also includes an indemnification statement the head of school must sign.

  o Attach a copy of the governing body resolution indicating approval for participating in ACSI's program of accreditation.

  o Indicate grades, enrollment, and location of school site(s) to be covered by accreditation.

  o Pay the application fee.

2. Candidacy Period (After Initial Application) Approximately 3 years prior to an accreditation visit:

YEAR 1: In most cases, an on-site visit will occur to determine if the school is a good candidate for accreditation. (In the U.S., the expenses for that visit are included in the application fee.) After the candidacy application has been accepted, the divisional office will review the results of the candidacy visit and the school should start working on the areas that need work as identified during the candidacy visit.

YEAR 2: When it is evident that the school is 12-18 months away from a team visit, a chairperson will be assigned to the school. The chairperson may schedule an on-site visit with the school to review the *Standards/Indicators Checklist* and see how they have been progressing and determine a date for the team visit. All expenses for visits (except for one candidacy visit for U.S. schools) are paid for by the school. Communication will need to occur with the divisional office to ensure that a team visit can occur at the desired time before a final date is set.

This is a good time to review the faculty qualifications requirement (Indicator 12.2 provides several options) to make sure that requirements will be able to be met by the time of the visit.

For schools outside the US, certification requirements are different and should be discussed with the chairperson or international/global accreditation office.

YEAR 3: Regular conversations should be set between the school and the chairperson. The need for an additional pre-visit will vary depending on whether the school is seeking initial accreditation or reaccreditation. In many cases, there is an additional visit in the last couple of months prior to the visit to accomplish the *Visit Readiness Checklist* and the *Standards 11 Checklist*. (Details below.)

3. Preparing For Accreditation—The Work of The Self-Study 18-24 months prior to the accreditation visit:

- Appoint a school coordinator. As is explained in the *Standards Manual*, this is usually the steering committee chairperson, as well. If the school coordinator and the steering committee chairperson are going to be different people at your school, clearly define how the two people will share the responsibilities.

  The head of school may desire to be the school coordinator or may prefer to appoint another school leader or teacher to that role. This person needs to be detail-oriented and able to organize people to complete tasks. (See the

Steering Committee Guide on page 10.) The leader and members of the steering committee will put in many long hours.

The steering committee should consist of various school leaders and all subcommittee chairs (if different from school leaders).

The steering committee will evaluate responses submitted for each domain, as well as the overall reflections and goals for improvement. They generally serve as the editorial committee for the self-study; however, the chairperson of each subcommittee for the self-study sections should be the first line of quality control in this process.

The steering committee should schedule regular meetings to evaluate the responses of the subcommittees and ensure things are progressing in a timely manner. It is recommended that the steering committee keep sufficient notes of meetings, tasks, and decisions throughout the process.

- Develop a timeline with the steering committee chair (use task-management software or Excel worksheet). The timeline should include the following components:

  o Beginning date of the self-study

  o Dates by which surveys are designed/ chosen and administered and results are distributed to subcommittees for their use

  o Meeting dates of steering and subcommittees (most schools find monthly meetings are helpful)

  o Deadline for preliminary data and documentation gathering

  o Dates for initial subcommittee reports due to steering committee

  o Final date for revisions of committee reports by steering committee

  o Date for evidence to be finalized and

organized by standard and indicator (first by committees and then reviewed by steering committee)

  o Final date for completion of self-study report (by chair of steering committee and those editing)

  o Date for the review of the self-study by the faculty and governing body

- Appoint subcommittees with at least 3-4 people serving on each committee. Involve governing body members, faculty, support staff, and parents where appropriate:

  o one subcommittee for each domain of the protocol (1–6); small schools may need to combine subcommittees.

  o logistics of the visit (travel, housing, meals, hospitality, workroom, technology, other logistics)

  o student assessment data analysis and interpretation

  o survey administration, collection of results, analysis, and interpretation

- If the school is involved in a joint accreditation process, review with the divisional accreditation director any special considerations that might apply.

- At least every other year, schools are expected to conduct surveys. The types of surveys, target audiences, required response rates, and expectations for reporting are all detailed in "Appendix D - Survey Administration" in the Standards Manual. It is important to read through those requirements early in the accreditation process in order to administer the surveys appropriately. A separate subcommittee for survey administration is recommended so that the decisions regarding administration, data collection, and analysis can be properly carried out, and the resulting information utilized by all the other subcommittees when needed.

4. Preparing for The Visit

- **Twelve (12) months prior to the visit**, work with the chairperson and the divisional office to finalize the dates of the team visit.

- **Four to six (4–6) months prior to the visit**, work with the chairperson to schedule his/her pre-visit. (This can vary by school.) This pre-visit determines if the school is indeed on schedule to host a visiting team.

  During the 4-6 months prior to the visit,

  o Review the *Standards/Indicators Checklist*, making sure to note any item that is marked below *Effective*. Communicate that to the chairperson if it looks like that will be the final rating. There may be time to resolve the issue, or it may result in a recommendation.

  o Request any needed assistance from your chairperson while conducting your school's self-study, organizing evidence, etc.

  o The chairperson may request to see sample sections of the self-study to make sure the report is being completed as expected.

- **Twelve (12) weeks prior to the visit**, be prepared to confirm with the chairperson that the steering committee and the subcommittees will be ready for the team visit:

  o Provide assurance that the self-study will be completed on time and evidence is well-organized and scheduled to be entered into the ePlatform on time, etc.

  o Ask any necessary questions prior to the team's arrival (special needs, allergies, etc.).

  o Confirm travel/accommodation arrangements.

  o Complete the self-study using the *Self-Study Word Template*. Editing various sections of the report is easier prior to uploading the self-study into the ePlatform.

  o Review several sections of the self-study with the chairperson in plenty of time to make changes, if needed. Included in the self-study will be the school's prioritized goals for improvement based on the entire self-study process.

  o Begin uploading the self-study to the ePlatform once all information is finalized.

- **Eight (8) weeks prior to the visit:**

  o Work with the chairperson as he/she completes the *Visit Readiness Checklist* and the *Standard 11 Checklist*. If the chairperson has not previously visited campus, he/she should visit the campus at this time. If the chairperson has previously visited, these checklists may be completed virtually. These determine whether the visit is a "GO" or not! (This visit may take place earlier for International/Global schools.)

  o Finalize hotel, transportation, and meal arrangements with chair and team.

  o Furnish campus layout, bell schedules, rosters, etc.

  o Confirm the location of the workroom for the team, including technology setup.

  o Finalize schedule with details for interviews, meetings, room assignments, etc. (See Schedule Considerations at the end of this section.)

- **Six (6) weeks prior to the visit**, submit the completed self-study as directed in the ePlatform.

  Follow the directions from your divisional office as to any other copies that need to be submitted (if jointly accredited).

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5. The Visit

- Plan to host the team as your coworkers and colleagues. See the page on Logistics and Hospitality (Page 13).

- Prepare your faculty and staff for the team's visit. See the page on Preparing Your Faculty and Staff for the Team's Visit (page 15).

- As school coordinator, make sure your own schedule is completely open while the visiting team is on campus. That way you can schedule ad hoc meetings, locate additional evidence, and make any necessary adjustments that need to be made last minute.

- Near the end of the visit, or the afternoon before, (see Sample Schedule in the *Chair and Team Member Handbook* for suggested time), along with selected members of the visiting team, there will be a meeting with the head of school, school coordinator, and other members of school leadership to **collaborate on the prioritized goals** from the school's self-study in conjunction with the general findings of the accreditation team. The results of this discussion should assist the school in creating its *Accreditation Action Plan* to address the main areas for ongoing improvement. You will want to discuss who should attend with your head of school.

- A couple of hours before the end of the visit, the team chair (and assistant chair, if applicable) will meet with head of school, school coordinator, and school leadership (as determined by the school) to **review the draft** of the team's Major Commendations and Accreditation Action Items to clarify what will be in the final report. (The collaborative discussion of the goals most likely occurred prior to this. See above.) If there is time, the chair may read all of the commendations and recommendations at this meeting and take questions.

- Depending on what the school would like, the team is usually able to give a summary (**exit report**) of the team's findings to a larger group as part of an exit meeting. The school can choose to limit the exit report to just school leadership or invite other stakeholders as desired.

  Typically, the team will:

  o Briefly review major commendations and Accreditation Action Items (to be developed by the school in its *Accreditation Action Plan*).

  o Remind the school that the commission makes the final decision on accreditation.

  o Congratulate the school on a job well done!

- **Final details for the team prior to departure:**

  o Distribute reimbursements to the team if documents have been submitted.

  o Thank the team for their service.

6. Follow up for the School

- A final draft of the visiting team report will be available to the school approximately thirty (30) days after the visit. (This may vary with holidays.)

- The school's self-study report and the visiting team report will be submitted to the appropriate ACSI divisional commission for its upcoming meeting. Most occur semi-annually. Following the meeting of the commission, the school will be notified regarding its accreditation status and any changes the commission may have made to the report.

- Accredited schools receive an ACSI certificate signifying the accreditation of the school.

- If a midterm visit or report is required, that

will be communicated by the divisional commission. A mid-term visit may be virtual or in-person. Some regional accreditation partners' requirements vary.

- An annual report is required of each accredited school. The requirements of those annual reports may vary by year and will be communicated to the schools by the divisional office.

Schedule Considerations

The school coordinator and the visiting team chairperson work together to finalize the schedule for the team visit with details for interviews and meetings, including times and room assignments.

1. When the team first arrives, they will need some time to meet, most likely at the hotel.

2. Plan an initial meeting with the governing body and key staff on the first evening the team arrives on the campus. Time is precious and should not be used by the school to present material the team has already received. If this is a meeting with the governing body, sometimes the large group meeting starts with a meal and then school leaders leave while the team has a time of dialog with the board.

3. Arrange for a tour of facilities the day the team arrives. That often happens late afternoon when the team arrives or before school the first morning.

4. Some schools provide a very brief get-acquainted time with the faculty before school the first morning. The team chairperson may address the faculty briefly and introduce team members.

5. On the first morning, it is essential that the team settle into the workroom, connect with the technology, and acclimate to the layout of the school as quickly as possible. Classroom observation time is limited, and the team must make use of every hour students are in class.

6. The team will need opportunities to interview students, parents, governing body members, school leaders, and other key people. When a group of students, parents, or teachers is interviewed, the group should contain a good sampling of individuals (including male/female, new/established, younger/older). It is best to have a cross section who will share open and honest feedback about the school and avoid having family members of board members, school leaders, or faculty in those meetings. The meetings with students often happen in conjunction with a noon meal. Parents often like to meet over coffee or near the end of the school day just before school lets out. School leaders do not attend those meetings with the team.

Note: Schools may not be able to do all of these things at the same time. Each school will need to work out a schedule that makes sense in their context.

See the Sample Schedule in the *Chair and Team Member Handbook*

Steering Committee Guide

The steering committee is the management team for the accreditation process at the school. They provide the organization and inspiration for staff members as they tackle the complex process of accreditation. Each member should view accreditation as integral to the ongoing process of school improvement and count it a privilege to serve their school in this way. Since service on this committee takes extra time and energy, it is important that committee members understand the significance of their task. It is imperative they commit to regular attendance, meeting deadlines, and praying for the school throughout the process.

It is hoped that this description of duties will provide a framework of the who, what, and how of the accreditation process.

Committees

1. **Steering Committee**

   The steering committee is usually made up of

   - Selected School Leaders
   - Each Subcommittee Chairperson

2. **School Coordinator or Steering Committee Chair**

   This position may be filled by the same person or two people. The school coordinator needs to be someone who is respected by the school community, is able to manage a multi-stage project, and has a good grasp of how to lead many people toward a single goal. Their most important skills may be that of a project manager. The chair of the steering committee needs a slightly different set of skills. They will lead the meetings where all the reports come in. The steering committee usually has several school leaders and the chairs of the various subcommittees. The chair of the steering committee needs to be skilled in running meetings, bringing people to consensus, summarizing, and then consolidating and editing the overall report. These two roles work closely with one another and can certainly be the same person in some cases. At other schools, they might be different people, as long as they can work well as a team.

   For the purposes of this handbook, we will refer to the school coordinator for the most part. If your school chooses two different people for these roles, divide up the responsibilities as the skills/personalities would suggest.

3. **Domain Subcommittees**

   A subcommittee for each of the six domains should be established with at least 3–4 members and one of those assigned as the subcommittee chairperson. These subcommittees will lead the efforts of their assigned domain; however, they will often recruit assistance and input from appropriate stakeholders within the school community. For example, all faculty will be involved in developing the curriculum documentation required for Domain 3: Teaching and Learning, whereas only a few would need to serve on the committee.

   In small schools, subcommittees may be combined as necessary.

4. **Logistics and Hospitality Committee**

   This committee will oversee making the arrangements for the visiting team. (See section on Logistics and Hospitality.)

5. **Student Assessment and Survey Administration Committees**

   Schools find it helpful to have one or two committees dedicated to these two areas to collect and analyze data from both student assessments and stakeholder surveys (see the *Student Assessment* Appendix and the *Survey Administration* Appendix in the *Standards Manual*).

6. **Work Assignments for the Self-Study Subcommittees**

   The most beneficial part of the accreditation process is what the school learns about itself through the self-study, which is conducted

by subcommittees that review, analyze, and evaluate every area of the school's program. The *Standards Manual* provides the standards and indicators with which the school will assess itself, as well as various appendices that outline the requirements of the self-study process. Because there is great value in the self-study process, it is crucial that all the faculty and school leaders have a role in the self-study, and it is expected that every staff member will feel ownership in the process. Involvement produces a staff that is invested in accomplishing the goals they help develop.

The steering committee begins by:

- Developing a timeline for the self-study process. (Project management software or a spreadsheet works well.) The timeline should establish deadlines for subcommittee work.

- Setting regular meeting dates. (Most schools find that monthly meeting dates are helpful, though some schools set meetings more frequently.)

7. **Guide for the Subcommittees**

- Read through the standards and indicators contained in the *Standards Manual*.

- Review the documentation listed in the *Evidence Guide*. Determine for each area what additional evidence (if any) is necessary to provide a concise, yet complete and accurate response. The subcommittee should not assume that what is put forth in the curriculum, policies, and documents of the school is what is actually experienced by the students or staff. This can be verified by taking surveys, interviewing constituents, reviewing course evaluations, examining student work, analyzing test scores, and other methods of determining if the planned activities are accomplishing the desired outcomes.

- Based on its determination of "what is," the subcommittee takes into consideration its findings along with the school's Christian approach to education,

mission, learning expectations, and schoolwide expected student outcomes. The subcommittee determines "what should be" by comparing each area to the standards and indicators, using the universal rubric as a guide. The subcommittee seeks to reach consensus on what rating is most appropriate for each indicator. If agreement is not reached, the subcommittee determines what additional evidence is needed and seeks to obtain consensus.

- The final portion of each self-study section asks the domain subcommittee to identify areas of strengths and where improvements are most needed. Then, based on an analysis of indicator ratings, strengths, and areas for improvement, each domain subcommittee will be asked to reflect on their school's distinctives and challenges in that domain area. A narrative response focused on providing this context is required for each domain. The process should be managed by the subcommittee chairperson so that there is a variety of input, discussion, and suggestions before the report is finalized and submitted.

- The subcommittee's report, including the ratings, strengths, areas for improvement, and corresponding narrative, is submitted to the steering committee for its review. The steering committee should come to consensus on the ratings.

- The steering committee evaluates the narrative reports for accuracy, completeness, consistency, and thoroughness. The report is edited for readability and transferred into the ePlatform.

- Once approved by the steering committee, the report is made available to the faculty and governing body for review. Their suggestions are reviewed and incorporated, if appropriate.

- The steering committee then finalizes the report and the evidence that is to be submitted with the report.

- The report and the attached evidence are to be submitted at least six weeks prior to the visit.

Please note: The visiting team chairperson will need to see sample sections of the self-study along the way to make sure the report is being completed as intended, including the prioritized goals for improvement. The chairperson may also check with the head of school or school coordinator periodically to make sure that the process is on schedule. That may involve a visit, a telephone call, or a teleconference. Generally, at least one on-site pre-visit will take place prior to the accreditation team visit, whether that is early in the self-study process, or at the time of chairperson's completion of the *Visit Readiness Checklist* and the *Standard 11 Checklist*.

Feel free to request help from the chairperson at any time during the self- study process. He/she is the school's best resource on how to complete the self-study, organize evidence, and respond to situations that are not covered in the *Standards Manual*. If there are features unique to a region or global setting, the chairperson will help with those as well.

8. **Special Instructions for Domain 3: Teaching and Learning**

    Domain 3: Teaching and Learning contains two standards that will require additional input from school leaders and faculty.

    - Standard 8 describes what is expected regarding the school's curriculum documentation, which requires the involvement of all faculty members in its creation and ongoing development. See the *Curriculum Documentation Requirements* Appendix in the *ACSI Inspire Standards Manual* for specific requirements.

    - Standard 9 details the expectations for schools to collect various forms of student assessment data, analyze that data, and utilize the data for program improvement. The self-study will contain specific questions that must be addressed. It is recommended

that the steering committee create a separate subcommittee dedicated to student assessments. See the *Student Assessment* Appendix in the *Standards Manual* for specific expectations.

- As a whole, Domain 3 may have more evidence than the other domains. It is appropriate for a school to show examples of how they are effectively meeting the Domain 3 standards and indicators in several subject areas and at several levels (elementary, middle school, and high school). However, it is not necessary to upload all curriculum documents into the ePlatform. Schools often provide a separate link to curriculum documentation. As you will be reminded in the evidence guide, the visiting team only has time to view a certain amount of evidence. It is far better to give them a few well-selected pieces showing effectiveness in that indicator from across the range rather than overwhelm them with large quantities. If you have questions about how much evidence is appropriate, contact your chairperson. They will help you stay within what is considered an appropriate amount for the team to manage.

Suggested resources for each subcommittee (electronic access is suggested so that links to additional resources and the glossary are active):

1. Steering Committee Guide pages (page 10 of this handbook)

2. The *Standards Manual* so that the subcommittee can access their domain standards/indicators, the universal rubric, and glossary terms as needed

3. Reflective Questions that apply to their domain, if any

4. Information on writing tips (can be found in the *Chair and Team Member Handbook* Appendix B)

5. *Evidence Guide* pages appropriate for their domain

Logistics and Hospitality

Hosting an Accreditation Team—Hospitality and Logistics

For schools seeking accreditation, the climactic experience is the [team visit](). The team arrives on site with the desire to serve the host school well, collaborate with the school over goals, and to accomplish a credible job that will ultimately lead to school improvement. To facilitate the work of the team, the host school should create a positive environment for the team members. While these matters may appear trivial, it is appropriate to show appreciation since each visiting team member is a volunteer, completed "homework" for the visit ahead of time, made arrangements to leave their own school, and will be working long hours while they are assisting the host school in this way. Doing everything possible to facilitate their work helps the visit go more smoothly.

It is not expected that the school spend beyond what is financially reasonable. However, it is crucial for the host school to allocate sufficient funds to accomplish the process of accreditation in a professional and welcoming manner.

Hosting the team includes pre-visit contact, on-site logistics, and post-visit communication. The following is a suggested guide:

1. Pre-visit contact—Prior to the visit, the host school can begin to orient the team and establish rapport to prepare the way for a successful on-site visit.

   - Inform each team member of lodging and travel arrangements, including the name, address, and phone number for the hotel. The school should also provide information for a primary school contact. Include a cell phone number for emergencies while traveling.

   - Provide a private room for each team member when making lodging arrangements. It is often necessary to work late into the night or get up very early to complete the necessary work.

   - Designate one person at the school to communicate with team members about travel and lodging information and any special needs they may have. For visits that require team members to fly, team members need to wait until the school gets the "Go ahead" from the team chairperson before they book tickets, usually eight weeks prior to the visit. The team chair will work with the designated person to coordinate travel arrangements.

   - If flight arrival times are an hour or more apart, it would be helpful if team members could have transportation to the hotel (or school) arranged separately. Long waits at the airport should be avoided.

2. On-site logistics

   - Review the nature and purpose of the visit with the school's governing body, faculty, staff, students, and parents at the outset of the visit. (See Preparing Faculty and Staff for the Team Visit.) The visiting team chairperson may be able to help lay the groundwork for the on-site visit during the governing body meeting and during an introductory session for faculty and staff.

   - Provide name tags for team members and host school faculty. Make sure the print is large enough to be easily read.

   - Provide a map/site plan of the [facilities](), bell schedule, and faculty roster for team members when they first arrive (for their orientation meeting). These will allow them to adequately plan their classroom visitation schedule. Arrange for team members to have access to classrooms and hallways if they are normally kept locked.

   - Provide large signs and/or student guides at key intersections in school hallways.

   - Make sure that student work is prominently on display so that evidence of student learning is visible throughout the school.

- Provide a private workroom (conference room or something similar) for the team at the school. The workroom should have Internet access, multiple electrical outlets, and basic office supplies. Schedule the school's tech person to be available to connect laptops to the network when the team first comes on-site.

  The team chairperson should work with the school coordinator ahead of time to approve the size and location of the workspace.

- Drinks and snacks are much appreciated by the team members and should be made available in the meeting room. This is an inexpensive way to show appreciation for the long hours of work accomplished over these days. This is an excellent way for parent volunteers to be involved.

- While most evidence should be available to teams electronically prior to the visit, there may be some items such as student work that need to be viewed while onsite. Those can be displayed in the team workroom or nearby. Confidential items such as personnel or financial files may be left where they are normally housed and the team member responsible will go to that location to view them.

- A continental breakfast can be arranged for the team at the hotel or host school. Provide lunches at the school since it is too time consuming for the team to leave. For evening meals, work with the team chairperson to determine if the team would prefer to dine out or have food brought to the hotel. Time is a very important factor.

- Make sure the team has transportation to and from the hotel. If team members drive during the visit, their mileage should be included in the reimbursement.

- If possible, arrange for reimbursement for the expenses of the visiting team before they leave the campus. Some team members may not submit their receipts until they return home if they have parking, tolls, a meal, or other unknown costs to include.

- Before the team leaves the school, an exit report may be shared with the school staff and invited guests. Be sure to clarify who your school wants invited to that meeting. It can be a small group such as the leadership team or it can be a larger group, at the school's discretion. Sometimes the school chooses to celebrate and congratulate their entire staff for a job well done even though they do not have the final outcome in hand. The actual accreditation decision will be made by the divisional accreditation commission at a later date.

3. Post-visit communication—If the school desires, about a week after the on-site visit has been completed, it is appropriate for the head of school or school coordinator to communicate a word of thanks to each team member. An expression of gratitude is always welcome and will serve as a reminder that you appreciated their sacrifice of time and energy on your behalf. Someday, you may have the opportunity to serve an ACSI school in the same way!

— PILOT —

Preparing the Faculty and Staff for the Team Visit

The more the school leadership has done to prepare the school staff, faculty, and governing body members for the accreditation visit, the more effective the visit will be. Following are a few suggestions:

1. From the very beginning of the process (even before the self-study has been started) everyone should be informed of the purposes as well as the procedures for achieving accreditation. The visiting team's purpose is to validate the school's self-study and to collaborate with school leadership around the school's goals for improvement. Be sure the staff knows that the quality and completeness of the self-study is key to the visit. The team also evaluates whether school policies, procedures, and programs are in accordance with the school's mission and meet the standards for an accredited school.

2. A competent, experienced team of teachers and school leaders are invited to the campus as the visiting team. It is good to remind the staff that team members are their peers, volunteering their time, and they come desiring to be helpful. They are brothers and sisters in Christ and are professional colleagues with similar interests and goals.

3. Challenge the staff to pray for the team members leading up to the campus visit. It is good to tell the staff in advance who the team members are, and what schools they represent.

4. Encourage the faculty to get to know the team members whenever possible. This greatly helps to lessen the tension as they perceive the genuine, sincere interest of the team members. Also, encourage them to share freely and honestly with the team since this free and open dialogue is what will make the accreditation process work. Let staff know that all discussions are confidential, and no names appear in the report.

5. Faculty should be actively engaged with students in typical classroom instruction when the visiting team is present. There should be no scheduled tests, extended videos, field trips, or any special programs other than chapel. No special "accreditation visit" lessons are to be developed for the ACSI visitors. Classroom observations make up a significant part of the on-campus portion of the visit. It is very important for the teachers to adhere to the teaching schedule which has been given to the team.

6. The goal for the team is to briefly observe as many classrooms as possible. The purpose is not to evaluate individual teachers but to get an impression of the learning environment, student engagement, and conditions that support learning. Ask faculty to leave a chair by the door with lesson plans on the chair to minimize disruption. Faculty should not stop instruction to introduce team members.

7. Request that teachers explain the visit to their students so they, too, will know why visitors are on the campus. School leaders may want to explain the process and timing of the accreditation visit to parents so that they are informed and encouraged by this initiative.

8. The faculty and non-instructional staff may expect to be briefly interviewed individually and/or collectively.

9. School leaders do not attend the meetings with the team when they are talking with the governing body, parents, students, and teachers. Those meetings are meant to be times when the constituent groups can openly share their views of what is happening at the school. These are not conducted in such a way to encourage complaining. Specific questions will be asked to verify the school's report and gain further evidence that what they see on paper is what really happens for students, parents, and faculty.

10. The visit will result in a written report in which the team, collectively, will make commendations and recommendations on each section of the self-study and provide feedback to help the school finalize their future goals.

11. Staff should know that the school leaders will hear the summary of the team's findings before the team leaves (exit report). It is up to the school leadership who is invited to the exit meeting they may schedule.

The School's Self-Study

The school's self-study provides the opportunity to do an important self-assessment in preparation for targeted growth. The self-study examines all aspects of school foundations, operations, programs, and conditions that support student learning. Information is gained through objective evidence such as scores and other metrics and more subjective evidence such as surveys. Each subcommittee compares actual performance in their area against the criteria or benchmarks that apply. When subcommittees are formed and given specific indicators to rate, they provide a well-balanced look at the domain and potential areas of needed growth. There is wisdom in a team approach. The combined group asks questions from a variety of angles, enhancing capacity for a more holistic view of the area and seeing a wider range of possible solutions.

The school uses the analysis from the various subcommittees to create prioritized goals for improvement, which are specific to their needs. After the visit, the school will incorporate the Accreditation Action Items into their *Accreditation Action Plan* and develop those with comprehensive plan information. Upon receiving accreditation, the school will update the plan annually and report on those updates at the mid-term report. The following is a brief description of the self-study. More detail is provided in the ePlatform as each textbox has a prompt that helps the steering committee know specifically how to respond.

Outline of Self-Study

1. **Introduction to the Self-Study**

   - Introduction/Profile - This section will be imported into the visiting team report. It contains basic school information, demographics, history and mission, significant changes, response to previous recommendations, and survey information.

2. **Standards and Indicators Assessment**

   - Indicator effectiveness ratings

   - Strengths

   - Areas for improvement

   - Narrative reflections by domain. Each domain has a textbox for explanation or context.

3. **Reflection Questions –** some of these relate primarily to a single domain and others are more holistic

4. **Conclusion –** reflective summary which could include:

   - Themes

   - Overall distinctives or challenges

   - General Direction of the School

   - Indication of how the accreditation process assisted the school with school improvement

5. **Prioritized Goals for Improvement –** prioritized goals based on the school's accreditation process

ACSI Policies for Visiting Team Expenses

The ACSI Board of Directors has established the following practice regarding reimbursement of travel expenses. *

1. All air travel must be approved in advance by the team chairperson and the head of school (or school coordinator). When flying, it is expected that team members will fly at the lowest discount rate using airline-imposed restrictions such as the following:

   - Booking tickets which must be purchased a certain number of days in advance. (Approval is typically given to team members to purchase a ticket after a school has successfully completed their 8 week Visit Readiness Check.)

   - Changes in bookings should only be made with the approval of your school and the team chair if they involve pick-up schedule or fee adjustments.

2. Reimbursement will be paid based on the least expensive rate between the comparisons of the lowest airline discount rate plus parking at the airport and the appropriate mileage rate for driving, plus meals en route.

3. When driving, reimbursement will be at the current IRS per mile rate. It is the chairperson's duty to find the current IRS rate from HQ or the divisional office. If the team member is stopping for other business en route, the cost of reimbursement will be shared, and the school will pay its prorated share.

4. Car rental requires advance authorization by the chairperson and the school.

5. Original receipts are required unless the school accepts receipts digitally.

6. Expenses that will not be reimbursed include items not directly related to ACSI business, such as telephone calls, meals for family members and guests, entertainment, etc. Team members should ask the hotel to separate those expenses from the final bill so the team member can pay for them personally.

*Use of an ACSI alternate accreditation protocol, endorsement protocol, or addendum may require ACSI to add visiting team members with specialized training, knowledge, or experience that would need to travel from a greater distance than team members on a typical visiting team. Reasonable travel expenses would need to be accounted for accordingly and reimbursed by the school.

— PILOT —

Glossary

Academic Counseling: Service to parents and students who are in need of advice or assistance with course selection, graduation requirements, college entrance examinations, college acceptance requirements, and general readiness for the next academic level.

Accountability: Any number of ways the school ensures continued fulfillment of its own mission and other stated objectives. Through open communication and transparency, regular feedback from stakeholders can help the school identify ways to improve in meeting their own mission, policies, goals, and/or objectives.

Accreditation: The status granted to a school after standards have been met, a self-study has been written, a team has completed a peer-review process, and the commission has approved the school for accreditation. Accreditation is granted for six years or a period commensurate with that of another agency in a joint accreditation.

Accreditation Action Plan (AAP): A school's annualized plan for improvement created as a result of the areas for improvement identified through the accreditation self-study and visit process. Creation of the AAP is a multi-step process: the school establishes goals as part of the self-study, the school and the visiting team collaborate on those goals and the team's findings, and the school formalizes the written plan after the conclusion of the visit. The completed plan includes instructional, operational, and/or programmatic goals; strategies and timelines for reaching these goals; and assessment, personnel, resources, analysis, and reporting procedures to determine whether the goals have been achieved.

Administration: See School Leadership

Advisory Board: In church-sponsored schools that are governed by a church board, or in proprietary schools that may be led by an individual or team of founders/owners, an advisory board would function as an expert team of outside voices that lend experience and qualified input into various governance-related issues at the school. Though perhaps non-voting members of the governance structure, this group would serve as a sounding board for school leadership and as a liaison between school leadership and the church governing body or founder/owner of the institution.

Annual Report: A report submitted by the school to the appropriate Divisional or Global office wherein the school provides an update on demographics, gives notice of any substantive changes, and affirms ongoing progress on the Accreditation Action Plan.

Assessment (elementary/secondary): Methods of evaluating student performance and achievement – the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. Schools should implement both assessment of learning, as well as assessment for learning (formative, summative, objective, subjective, formal, informal, etc.).

- Authentic Assessment: A form of assessment that requires students to complete projects or perform skills which are tied to real-world tasks. Typically, students are graded with rubrics for the evaluation of these tasks rather than pencil and paper assessments.

- Range of Assessments (also Varied Assessments): Used to indicate that schools should implement several different forms and methods of assessment. Assessments utilized to meet the requirements could include standardized (multiple types), authentic, teacher-created, objective, subjective, formal, informal, summative, formative, and/or measures that utilize a combination of any of the above, as well as differentiated assessments based on learners' needs and interests.

— PILOT —

Biblical Integration (or Biblical Worldview Integration): The weaving of God's truth—in precept, principle, and practice—into teaching and learning in such a way that a unified, God-centered view of life is presented in order to promote authentic application into the lives of students.

Biblical Worldview: Recognizing the authority of Scripture as the source of truth and using it as the lens through which we attempt to understand and respond to our world.

Board: See Governing Body

Candidate Status: The status of a school when it is deemed able to complete the accreditation process in a three-year maximum time frame. Candidate status requires an application, candidacy visit, and approval. Candidate status is effective up to three full school years.

Certification: The status granted to teachers and administrators who meet specified academic requirements for an ACSI teacher/administrator credential.

Code of Ethics: An identified set of guidelines that each individual commits to upholding in his/her role. This may be a formal document, or a less formal list of expectations.

Continuous Improvement: A consistent effort to improve the school's processes, procedures, and practices that focus on teaching, learning, and student achievement. Ongoing efforts may also be warranted in other areas that contribute to the overall student experience.

Commission on Accreditation: The commission established by the ACSI Board of Directors to establish policy, create structure, and provide oversight for all accreditation activities of the Association. The commission also hears and adjudicates appeals from the divisional commissions and serves as the primary commission for specialty protocols and international schools.

Curriculum: The planned instructional program to be delivered to the students. Though a school's choice in textbooks and resources for any given grade level and subject area is an important consideration, the school's curriculum is much broader than a textbook series.

Curriculum Documentation: A written description of what is taught throughout the school that 1) describes the school's instructional program, 2) helps ensure continuity between grade levels and subject areas, and 3) provides a basis for evaluation of the school's instructional program.

Curriculum Guides/Maps: See Curriculum Documentation

Discipleship: To train another, through instruction and modeling, to follow Christ and practice spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and faithful living.

Digital Citizenship: Using technology in safe, effective, discerning, and responsible ways that affect student learning and the community at large.

Divisional Accreditation Commission: The commission made up of representatives from ACSI-accredited schools in each division, or subset of the division. The commission meets, usually twice a year, to review and monitor accreditation activity in the division and to make decisions on school accreditation.

Early Education (EE): The care and the education of children before kindergarten. Kindergarten may be included if the program is a standalone early education program.

Equitable Compensation: Impartially determined salary ranges based on objective criteria such as years of service, credentials, experience, and/or performance. Compensation information should be available to employees for review.

— PILOT —

Expected Student Outcomes: What the school intentionally targets for all students to know, believe, understand, and/or be able to do in academic and non-academic areas after their tenure in the school. Outcomes are based on the mission and philosophy of the school.

Executive Leadership: See School Leadership

Facilities: All buildings and grounds on school property or utilized by the school.

Faculty: Generally referring to the instructional staff of the school, especially in instances where it is pertinent to make a distinction between instructional staff and non-instructional staff.

Fidelity: The manner in which assessments are conducted in accordance with their original intent and with the same degree of accuracy every time.

Governing body: A group of elected or appointed individuals who come together to act as one for the purpose of establishing policies that will enable the school to achieve its established desirable ends and to avoid results it considers unacceptable. These individuals are "trustees" who have authority when sitting as members of the governing body. (See [reference the proprietary school doc].)

Head of School: The chief administrator/officer of the school. Titles for this role vary significantly from school to school (e.g., principal, administrator, headmaster, head of school, director, president, superintendent).

Indicators: Descriptions of essential practices, processes, and procedures that elaborate and explain how schools can effectively meet the standards of accreditation.

Instructional Methods: The techniques that a teacher uses (e.g., hands-on activities, peer tutoring, discussion, experimentation, learning centers, debates, role-play, drill, and practice) and adapts to the learning styles of the students.

Instructional Objectives: Statements that describe the skills or concepts the student will have attained when instruction in a particular subject, grade, unit, or lesson is completed.

Instructional Resources: The physical and digital resources that are available to support the instructional program. Instructional resources could also include supplemental materials that are used in the instructional program and are identified in the curriculum documentation.

Leadership: See School Leadership

Mentoring: To intentionally train another through relationship, instruction, and modeling.

Mid-term Report: A report provided by the school to the appropriate Divisional or Global office at or near the midpoint of a school's accreditation term, wherein the school provides more detailed updates on the AAP, faculty qualifications, and other applicable accreditation expectations. The Divisional or Global office will notify the school if a mid-term visit is required.

Mission: A brief statement of why the school exists and what the school seeks to accomplish.

Outreach: The action or activity of seeking to serve or otherwise connect with individuals or organizations outside of your own school in order to provide opportunities for students to develop Christian character.

Philosophy of Education: The philosophy that articulates the program's beliefs about how children learn and how they should be instructed and assessed. The statement guides the instructional methods and classroom practices deemed appropriate considering the program's view of the nature

and needs of children. A Christian school's philosophy of education would also articulate the place of faith in Christian education as well as how to integrate biblical truth into the overall curriculum planning and daily instruction.

Referral: A procedure by which a teacher, counselor, or other school personnel suggests school or community resources to assist a student who has learning, emotional, physical, or other needs.

School Leadership: The on-site, day-to-day leader(s) of the school, often referring to the administrative or leadership team that may include directors, principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors, deans, non-instructional leaders, etc. Leadership may include department heads or lead teachers.

Scope and Sequence: Included as part of the curriculum documentation, a scope and sequence indicates the breadth of the content and the order in which it will be taught within and across grades.

Self-Study: The document produced by the steering committee and the various subcommittees of the school as they respond to the standards, indicators, and other prompts of the accreditation protocol. This document is a collaborative effort of school groups and must represent the combined input, analysis, and consensus of all those involved, with sufficient evidence to demonstrate the school's effectiveness with regard to standards and indicators.

Spiritual Formation: The teaching and nurturing of students in the process of spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ. This includes the development of a biblical worldview and Christian character.

Staff: All personnel employed by the school unless otherwise designated (e.g., "instructional staff," "non-instructional staff," etc.).

Stakeholder(s): A person or group with direct interest, involvement, or investment in the realization of the mission of the school (e.g., staff, students, parents, governing body, community, and donors).

Standards: The 20 established qualitative criteria for school accreditation.

Steering Committee: A group of individuals at the school that is responsible for the development and completion of the self-study. The steering committee works with each of the subcommittees to train, advise, and hold them accountable for completing tasks.

Subcommittee: A group of stakeholders at the school that is responsible for a section of the self-study. Subcommittees report to the steering committee.

Team Visit: A visit to the school by peer educators wherein they validate the accuracy and thoroughness of the self-study. The team engages in observations and interviews, collaborates with the school around future goals, and constructs a team report. This visit is generally three to four days long.

Universal Rubric: The chart that defines or describes four levels of effectiveness as applied to all indicators in the *Inspire* protocol. Schools and visiting teams should use the universal rubric with the overall standard in mind as they review each indicator and provide evidence.

Visiting Team Report: A report written by the visiting team, in accordance with ACSI accreditation standards and policies, wherein the visiting team articulates their findings in the form of indicator ratings, commendations, recommendations, accreditation action items, and overall analyses.

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